New Academia: An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory

(Online ISSN 2347-2073) Vol. IV Issue I, Jan. 2015

GHOST'S LANGUAGE AND THE RECREATION OF IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*, MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* AND JOY KOGAWA'S *OBASAN*

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Abstract

The essay is devoted to the discussion about the language of ghosts and its relation to the revision of history/identity in three minority woman writers' works, including Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. The main concern is to investigate how the figures of ghosts, especially those silent female ones, manifest themselves to the living and effectuates the traumatized subjects of ethnic groups in North American to rewrite their history and reconstruct their identities. I first show how the three woman writers construct the novels within the framework of the gothic to expose the oppression and silencing of the minority women. In the second part of the essay I explore what the language of ghosts is and how it functions as a productive strategy for the re-creation of the repressed history and identity. By demonstrating an ambiguous role of the ghosts' anger as well as their silence in the novels, I suggest that the language of a ghost is the language of both sound and silence, namely in the forms of the ghost's madness and uncanny silence. It acts as subversion to the dominant narratives and prompts the protagonists to develop a new, open-ended and communal vision of culture and identity.

Keywords: ghosts, language, madness, silence, minority literature

> What does it mean to follow a ghost? And what if this came down to being followed by it, always, persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading? (Derrida 10)

In today's world, ghosts invade our popular culture, literature, and academic and critical discourses. In contrast to the living, ghosts are a non-present presence. They are real but usually invisible, and have been employed as metaphors of absence in many different cultures. Unlike the ancestors worshiped by Asians from generation to generation, ghosts are something unspeakable and forgotten. In African-American culture, ghosts usually refer to the spirits of the black ancestors who suffered the brutality of slavery, and thus represent the traumatic memories of African Americans, an experience that society usually ignores. From these perspectives, ghosts represent the marginalized, the repressed, and the silenced others and their histories.

Increasing scholarly attention has been paid to the usefulness of a ghost in the revisioning of history and identity in especially ethnic American literature. Avery Gordon argues that "to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities" is "to write ghost

stories" (17). Brogan claims that the "enactment of commemorative ritual" is always taking place during one's confrontation with ghosts (Brogan 138). Accordingly, tales of the spectral play an important role in representing history and voices of minority people from alternate and competing perspectives. One the one hand, the ghost stories are employed to consider the mechanism of spectralization and how such process of othering are utilized by ideologies of patriarchy, nationalism, imperialism and capitalism to label someone or something as ghostly and so create or maintain inequality in the society. On the other hand, the haunting of ghosts in ethnic American literature speaks to "the potential emergence of a different story and a competing history" (Weinstock 64). In such tales ghosts appear to resist containment and assimilation by continuously manifesting themselves in different forms. The spectral presences not only represent "our desires for truth and justice," but also "our longing for a coherent and 'correct' narrative of history."

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* function as such kind of ghost stories. Through their use of ghosts to signify the repression of histories and a mode of subjugation, they illustrated the process of spectralization and how it victimizes the minority groups or individuals that defy or exceed categorization or that threaten to dissolve the hetero-normative subject and the societal "I", due to their gender, sexuality, ethnicity and disability.

Morrison's *Beloved* begins with the baby ghost of Beloved haunting the house No. 124. Beloved is Sethe's baby daughter murdered by Sethe in a desperate bid to save her from the misery of slavery when her white owners tried to catch her and her children and bring them back to the Sweet Home. Connected to the oppression of African Americans, the ghost of Beloved represents the unspeakable past and the traumatic memories of slavery. She is "not only the spirit of Sethe's daughter," but also "the projection of the repressed collective memory of a violated people" (Heinze 179).

Subtitled "Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts," Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* begins with the story of the No Name Woman – the narrator's nameless aunt who became pregnant during the 'starvation time,' a period when "to be a woman, to have a daughter … was waste enough" (Kingston 6). Moreover, the narrator notes that adultery, "perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the villagers needed food" (13). In order to punish the nameless aunt for "acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" and for creating a break in the "roundness" of the community, the villagers attack the family house. After they leave, the family curses the aunt: "'Aiaa, we're going to die. Death is coming. Look what you have done. You've killed us. Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You've never been born'" (13-14). Here the term 'ghost' is used to signify shame and exclusion. Eventually, Kingston's aunt commits suicide by throwing herself and the baby into the community well and becomes a real ghost, wandering endlessly alone with no family member willing to remember or worship her. Marked as a stain on the family history, the aunt is deliberately forgotten and silenced. Jennifer Griffiths claims that the aunt's story acts as "pedagogy of shame" (Bartky 225) that "instructs young girls to learn about the inherent danger and corruption of their bodies" (Griffiths 356). As such, the ghost of the nameless

aunt represents the suppression of womanhood in a patriarchal society in general and more specifically, the oppression of Chinese American women in the United States.

Although ghosts are not directly represented in Kogawa's *Obasan*, the absent mother frustrates and haunts the protagonist, Naomi, from the beginning of the novel: "We are trapped, Obasan and I, by our memories of the dead—all our dead—those who refuse to bury themselves" (Kogawa 30). The text reveals that Naomi's mother left Canada to take care of Grandma in Japan, but was killed during the bombing of Nagasaki. In order to protect children from the sorrowful truth, the family erases these facts from the family narrative. At the same time, the Canadian Government's silencing of the experiences of Japanese Canadians during War World II in dominant and historical narratives causes undesirable collective amnesia of Japanese Canadians. Naomi says:

> We are hammers and chisels…the fragments of fragments that fly like arrows from the heart of the rock. We are the silences that speak from the stone. We are the despised rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera, and every means of communication…. We are the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future undemanding as dew. (Kogawa 132).

The silence of Mother's ghost and the silencing of her death not only symbolize the repression of Naomi's family memories but also the loss of Canadian Japanese's identity.

These three novels demonstrate the ways in which ghosts expose the individual traumas as well as racial and patriarchal oppression of minority people in North America. In addition, they show the deep connection between the suppression of the ghosts and loss of identity. The voices of the female ghosts in all the novels are either silenced or fragmented. The absence of the ghosts' voices illustrates that the dominant narratives, whether attempting to oppress, warn, or protect someone, repress the shameful and traumatic past. And the act of forgetting or silencing seems to prevent the living characters from establishing stable identities.

However, the ghosts don't merely represent metaphors of erasure or repression. In her 2003 essay about the Chinese diaspora in Australia, Wenche Ommundsen employs a term, "tough ghosts," mentioned by one of her interview subjects, to describe the resilient yet spectral presence and power of cultural traditions among the immigrant community. What she suggests is that the ghostly presence doesn't always lead to disturbing or destructive consequences for the diaspora; in some cases it may help to preserve elements of the cultural past in face of pressures or struggle of identification in a patriarchal and racial society. By portraying the strong presence of female ghosts and their vivid interaction with living characters, the three writers also employ ghosts as a powerful medium that enables healing of the traumatic past and re-creation of a more communal identity.

So far less attention has been paid to how the female ghosts manifest themselves to the living when their voices are silenced. If words or the symbolic order are the sources of oppression, what kinds of alternative language do they use to convey their otherness? Putting the questions in a more specific way: what is ghost's language? What is the difference between normal language and ghostly language? How does this alternative language function

in the revision of suppressed memory and identity? I suggest that "ghost language" has nothing to do with human language that is constructed in an orderly manner. It might exist outside the dominant linguistic and cognitive frames, and go beyond human knowledge. Because the ghosts are different in various social and cultural contexts, there are multiple kinds of ghost language. In *Beloved*, the baby ghost appears malevolent and vampiric as it marks the brutal history of slavery, genocide, racism, and infanticide of African Americans. In *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*, novels associated with Asian patriarchal oppression of womanhood, the ghosts of No Name Woman and Naomi's mother manifest themselves in an uncanny way. Thus, I divide the following part into two sections, one dealing with language of madness in *Beloved* and the other probing language of uncanny silence in *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*. I will investigate how the figures of ghosts, by haunting and interacting with the living in different manners, represent varied resistance to the dominant narratives that trap minority people in the erasure of subjectivity, so as to invoke a healing process and new narrative strategies for recreating a more communal memories and identities for the traumatized individuals and communities.

Language of Madness in *Beloved*

Madness has been "relegated to the female gender" in western social discourse and literature for several centuries (Mcneal 12). Imposed by patriarchal thought, madness and mental instability in women turn them into inferior people and victims. In most of Morrison's works, female protagonists are portrayed as mad or mentally unstable people undergoing severe exploitation. For instance, Sethe's murder of her child and denial of her motherhood function as symptoms of madness. However, madness cannot merely be regarded as a symbol of the passive nature of women. It also relates to acts of resistance that "give voice to those who are traumatized by oppressive social and familial forces" (Vickery 91).

The baby ghost's violent emotions and behaviors are a positive kind of madness. Brogan argues that, during "the intermediary period between provisional and final burials" the ghost often appears "malicious" and "troubling" (Brogan 22). I suggest that the malicious way in which the improperly buried ghost invades the affairs of the living is the language of madness. In some way, it can be understood in terms of Julia Kristeva's concept of the preverbal semiotic, obeying maternal instead of paternal law. It also acts as Irigarayen "hysteria" that refers to "a non-verbal language, a mode of physical communication that broadcasts a coded message" (Parker 2). In other words, it is intuitive, wordless, and often related to the female body and voice. Going beyond human language, such madness creates gaps and holes in dominant discourse and provides an alternate means to express the other's history. Moreover, acting as a mode of intervention, it urges the traumatized subjects to remember the repressed past and reconstruct their identities.

The ghost of Beloved uses the language of madness to articulate herself. Her madness is represented in several forms, including anger, desire, violence and by means of fragmented narratives. First, she manifests herself through acts of violence. Because she died before she was two years old, Beloved is unable to speak of her hatred and discontent. Therefore, she shows her rage by spilling things, smashing furniture, and attacking the dog. She turns house No. 124 into a place with spiteful feelings full of "a baby's venom" (Morrison, *Beloved* 3).

Beloved's madness is also expressed through her infinite desire, which Cixous links to hysteria. Cixous claims that a hysteric says, "I want everything" (Cixous and Clement 155). The metaphor of consumption plays a key role in the possession of the ghost. For example, because Beloved still has no voice for her painful memories after she returns in physical form, she conveys her feelings through her craving for sweets and her mother's love. She devours honey, wax, sugar sandwiches, sluggy molasses, lemonade, taffy, and every dessert that Sethe brings home from the restaurant. She also hungers for Sethe's love and develops a cannibalistic appetite toward her. She never takes her eyes from Sethe. Her gaze devours Sethe metophorically: "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (Morrison, *Beloved* 68). In addition, she desires urgently to fuse with Sethe. She says:

> I am Beloved and she is mine.
>
> I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too. (248)

Becoming greedier and greedier, Beloved finally "ate up her [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (295).

Beloved's fragmented voices during the possession are another expression of her madness. Speaking in a chaotic and fragmented way during her possession of Sethe, Beloved conveys the repressed voices of Sethe's slaughtered daughter, the black ancestors suffering in the Middle passage, and African-American women exploited in slavery and contemporary America. Distinguished by "its repetitiveness, fragmentation, unhinging of vocabulary," and "by its wily resistance to conventions of narrative organization," her voice succeeds in manifesting her otherness to the paternal symbolic order that is ordered, regulated, and marked by its denial of gaps and holes within its structure. By violently disrupting Sethe's and Denver's lives with her fragmented narrative, Beloved confronts them with the unspeakable thoughts of the dead—the traumatic history of slavery—which are suppressed in the patriarchal linguistic frame.

As a representation of Kristeva's concept of maternal semiotic, Beloved's madness marks "a dissatisfaction with the established order" (Parker 4) and represents "the traumatic nature of experience" (Brogan 75). By urging the living to reconstruct their memories and historical accounts of slavery, it impels them to re-create their individual and collective identities. Shu-li Chang claims that Beloved "signifies not what one already knows about the past, but the part of one's traumatic past that one doesn't yet know" (Chang 125). The white girl, who helped Sethe deliver Denver, says, "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (Morrison, *Beloved* 42), and "Can't nothing heal without pain" (92). Based on these statements, I suggest that the returned baby ghost brings back the traumatic memories, and, by living through them, the living characters are compelled to face their repressed past and work through their traumatic symptoms.

For example, Beloved's madness confronts Sethe with what she denies remembering and leads to her revision of the traumatic past. At the height of the possession, Beloved's voice is mingled with Sethe's and Denver's voices. Stamp Paid describes the sound as "a conflagration of hasty voices—loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out

what they were talking about or to whom," as something "nonsensical" and indecipherable (202). Though it appears as eerie noises to the outsider, the indecipherable dialogue of female voices invokes a transgenerational interaction among the traumatized subjects. It turns the haunted house into a surreal world, a place of "no-time," where the denied memories of personal and collective traumas are pressed into the present (225). The boundaries between the living and the dead, present and past, self and other, are eliminated. Sethe finally mingles with Beloved and confronts the denied memories of the past.

However, Sethe's complete retreat to the haunted house with Beloved's ghost almost destroys her. Beloved's madness transforms her into a cannibalistic figure that consumes the present with intrusive memories of a traumatic past. It locks Sethe into a repetitive enactment of the past "without relevance to present realities" (Brogan 10). Kristeva claims that "complete withdrawal into the semiotic leads to psychosis or even death" (Kristeva 82). When Sethe submits to the indefinite desires or madness of Beloved, she forgets to eat and almost loses her life.

Recognizing Beloved's severe threat to Sethe's life, the black community feels an urgency to exorcise the ghost. Thirty neighborhood women organize an exorcism in order to save Sethe and re-establish the boundary between the living and the dead. At the climax of the exorcism, they converge upon No.124, singing a pre-linguistic song. This wordless song represents "the lost language of Africa and Sethe's mother" (Rigney 62). The narrator says, "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (Morrison, Beloved 305). Turning to the communal experiences of African ancestors, the women of the community employ the song as a strategy for reshaping their relationship with the ghost and saving Sethe from self-destruction.

Feeling relived and connected to ancient African spirituality in the "word-breaking wave of sound," Sethe finally frees herself from her time-bound and traumatized identity (Brogan 85). By mistaking Bodwin for School Teacher, Sethe reenacts the murder of 19 years ago. But this time, she turns the ice pick toward the whites instead of desperately killing her own children. Her action successfully revises the traumatic past as she escapes from reenactment of the traumatic scene of murdering her own children. It is also in this scene that Beloved disappears. The communal wordless song not only successfully transforms the dangerous ghost into a safer presence, saving Sethe from the threat of being locked into her traumatic experience, but also prompts Sethe to call a new self into being.

By undertaking the exorcism of the ghost, the women of the community take responsibility for the crisis and re-construct their collective identity. Their performance marks the community's support, which was absent at the time of the original murder. When they approach No. 124, they remember the day when they refused to warn Sethe about the coming of the slave catchers. Through rememory of the traumatic past, they undergo "cultural memorization," which Mieke Bal defines as "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (Bal vii). They realize that the ghost of Beloved is not merely "one traumatic return" for Sethe but "a conflation of all these traumas and repression" of the community (Berger 201). By asserting Sethe's inclusion in the community and answering the call of the ghost, the

women of the community not only revise the injustices of the past, but also achieve emotional healing.

However, ghosts can never be exorcised completely because of their unassimilability and multiplicity. In Morrison's novel, although the non-verbal exorcism of the community temporarily chases Beloved's ghost away, it fails to properly bury the dead. After Beloved disappears, the community members intend to forget the unspeakable past. For them, "Remembering seemed unwise" (Morrison, *Beloved* 324). However, the more the community hopes to forget it "like a bad dream," the more the ghost resists the act of forgetting (323). The narrator says, "Occasionally, however, the rustle of a skirt hushes when they wake, and the knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep seem to belong to the sleeper…." Down by the stream of No. 124, people find the ghost's footprints coming and going (325). After the exorcism the slim traces of the ghost mark the continued presence of the traumatic past. The ghost of Beloved never really disappears. Rather, it exists silently in a liminal and marginal space and appears repetitively to remind the living of their unfinished mourning as well as their historical amnesia.

Morrison argues, "The past, until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves in other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again" (Morrison, *Interview* 68). Her statement reveals some important qualities of a ghost, including its uncanny haunting and multiplicity. By continuously confronting the living with its diverse atrocities, a ghost keeps calling for a proper answer to repression and injustice. In the following, I will illustrate how the ghost's uncanny silence represents another kind of ghost language and invokes textual commemorative rituals of the repressed past as well as re-creation of the minority women's identities in *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*.

Uncanny Silence as the Ghost's Language in *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*

In *Articulate Silence*, Cheung argues that "words can liberate, but they can also distort and wound, and while silence may obliterate, it can also minister, soothe, and communicate" (Cheung 128). Her statement complicates the notion of the contradiction between silence and speech. It implies that silence is not merely the absence of speech, but a productive way of communicating. Isabel Hoving explores both negative and positive meanings of silence and argues that silence can be regarded as "the inability to make an authoritative use of dominant or even nondominant discourses," or as "an inarticulated blabbering and madness," as well as "an instrument to find a new voice" (Hoving 23). It helps open a space where "counterdiscursivity" and "the plurality of identity" can be expressed. Likewise, Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests that silence is "a means to gain a hearing," and "a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right" (Minh-ha 83). Relating these concepts of silence to the ghost's uncanny silence in *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*, I will argue that silence should not be perceived as "undesirable silences" that mark absence, muteness, and the lack of subjectivity in minority experiences (Cheung 20). It also functions as "enabling silences," a way of telling that effectuates minority people to revise the dominant narrative and to re-create their identities.

In *The Woman Warrior*, by creating gaps in the closed family narratives full of silence, the ghost of the protagonist's nameless aunt conveys its repetitive and uncanny effects on the protagonist. It is a paradoxical situation. Since No Name Woman bears the unspeakable shameful history, the family makes efforts to veil her story. Brave Orchid not only forbids young Maxine to mention the nameless aunt, but also withholds most of the story. However, the more the family tries to contain the aunt's story through denial, the more fascinating her ghost appears in the shaping of the passed-down narratives. Her silence creates enigma and holes within the hegemonic discourse, encouraging the protagonist to question the established narratives and create new versions of the story.

Cheung states, "This haunting silence is precisely what gives wings to the niece's imagination, allowing Maxine to test her own power to talk story and to play with different identities" (Cheung 85). Haunted by the absence of truth, Maxine feels the urgency to perform the rituals of mourning by rewriting her aunt's story, devoting "pages of paper to her" (Kingston 16). By inventing new memories of her aunt, she breaks the family's secrecy surrounding the shameful past and gives voices to the women who have been excluded from the dominant narratives. Being a woman is no longer shameful. Her new version of the story challenges hegemonic sexual and patriarchal discourses and releases her from the burden of a woman's body.

Maxine also recreates her identity by establishing a kinship with her aunt's ghost. In her revised version of the nameless aunt's story, she imagines the aunt as a vengeful ghost and actively reanimates "the aunt as a forerunner" (Brogan 138). She says, "She (the aunt) was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost… waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute" (Kingston 16). By taking the ghost's rebellious nature as an inheritance, she has power to challenge the constraints of dominant narratives and invent a new identity—"a new Chinese American tradition"—that negotiates two contrasting cultures (Cheung 85).

By reinterpreting the Chinese legend of Ts'ai Yen in the concluding story of the novel—"A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe"—the narrator represents a new language/norm that is open-ended for its interethnic harmony. She illustrates that, during the exile, Ts'ai Yen creates a song that connects her mother tongue and the barbarian music for her children:

> Then, out of Ts'ai Yen tent … the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes…Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger… She brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well. (Kingston 209)

Ts'ai Yen's song acts as a kind of translation between two cultures, bridging the past and the present, the ancestral roots and the foreign culture. It evokes what Duplessis calls a "both/and vision," the one "born of shifts, contraries, negations, contradictions and linked to personal vulnerability and need" (Duplessis 276). Such a vision is able "to criticize, to differentiate

from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowledge and understanding with which they are saturated" (285).

The "both/and vision" of the song marks the possibility of transcending the ghost's silence and recreating a communal and trans-cultural identity. The narrator says, "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (Kingston 206). The novel begins with Brave Orchid's story of the No Name Woman who is silenced by the family, and ends with the story of Ts'ai Yen, who, instead of being nameless, "achieves her mortal fame by singing about her exile" (Cheung 95). By using her story as a revised narrative to coincide with her mother's, Maxine achieves a symbolic return to her community and re-creates her bicultural identity. She says, "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs" (Kingston 53). Taking her words and stories that bridge her bicultural resources as a weapon, she emulates the legendary swordswoman and reconstructs "a composite self" (Cheung 100). In sum, the ghost's uncanny silence not only functions as a source for her imagination, but also leads to a new narrative strategy that propels her to recreate a new and communal identity for Asian American women.

A similar haunting of silent ghosts occurs in *Obasan*. The more Naomi avoids the memory of her experiences of sexual abuse and racial oppression, the more the ghosts haunt her in a silent and repetitive way. She says, "Potent and pervasive as a prairie dust storm, memories and dreams seep and mingle through cracks, settling on furniture and into upholstery" (Kogawa 25). Although the ghost's silence represents the suppression of memories, its uncanny implication still reaches Naomi in her dreams and memories and on a subconscious level. For instance, during the wake for Uncle, Naomi feels "Uncle's absent voice that speaks even more urgently and that I must attend." The voice bids her to "care for Obasan" and to "keep her safe" (56). Without speaking a word, the ghost of Uncle delivers his message to Naomi and makes her act.

The ghost of Naomi's mother, though continuing "her vigil of silence," also invokes a cyclic repetition of images and senses in Naomi's dreams and involuntary memories (283). From the beginning of Chapter 15, the memories she intends to forget flood into her consciousness involuntarily. Naomi begins to narrate the story of her family, "It is three decades ago…" (132). In addition, images of oriental women connected with the fragmented memories of her silent mother keep appearing in her dreams. Those images act as a medium through which her mother's ghost returns "with all the immediacy and power of Benjamin's 'lived life,'" threatening to displace the present (Cook 61). They direct Naomi's attention to the untold stories, the stories that resist being remembered, such as that of her mother's death in Japan during the war. In other words, the ghost's uncanny silence functions as an intriguing enigma that urges Naomi to listen to the dead and look for "corners and rooms" she has never seen in the "childhood house" (Kogawa 95).

By responding to her mother's uncanny haunting, Naomi overcomes her denial of the traumatic past and begins to accept Aunt Emily's idea that "the past is the future" (51). She decides to listen to the words in Grandma Kato's letter. When Nakayama-Sensei reads the

letter, he begins, "Naomi, Stephen, your mother is speaking. Listen carefully to her voice" (279). The letter describes Naomi's mother's story during the bombing of Nagasaki and unveils her family's unknown past. Upon learning the reason for her mother's disappearance, Naomi seems to gain access to the absent voice of the ghosts. She claims, "Gradually the room grows still and it is as if I am back with Uncle again, listening and listening to the silent earth and the silent sky as I have done all my life" (288). At that moment, she gives in to the unfamiliar presence of the repressed memory, a sigh of "remembered breath, a wordless word" (289), and rebuilds a spiritual and emotional connection with the dead.

In the beginning, the narrator says, "The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence." By attending to the hidden words in this "amniotic deep," Naomi recaptures a sense of wholeness. She no longer blames her mother's absence. On the contrary, she realizes that the Grand Inquisitor's accusatory "demand to know," with which she unconsciously complies, is "a judgment and a refusal to hear" that separates her from her mother (Kogawa 273). This insight frees Naomi from the phallic authority of the symbolic order that constructs the dominant notion of phenomenal distinction between speech and silence. Naomi finally escapes from the temporal and logical world and reunites with her mother: "I am thinking that for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here" (Kogawa 292). She reaches a universe where she is able to "swim full circle back to that other shore and her mother's arms" (Kogawa 17) and re-creates her identity by having "her leg become the grounded family tree for a future generation" (Tourino 146).

Naomi's spiritual integration with her mother enables her to learn a new communal language associated with love and double-vision. Before she learns her mother's story, she has an instructive dream: "What the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence. To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent" (Kogawa 273-74). The dream foreshadows a new language/identity which marks the connection between silence and speech. When her mother's "wordless word" is uncovered on the night Grandma Kato's letter is read to her, Naomi experiences both verbal and nonverbal expressions of love in Mother's/Obasan's silence and Emily's words. She says, "The letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through the roots of the trees by our graves" (292). Thus, s She begins to think about the complementary relationship between two ideographs for the word "love": "The first contained the root words 'heart' and 'hand' and 'action'—love as hands and heart in action together. The other ideograph, for 'passionate love', was formed of 'heart', 'to tell', and 'a long thread'" (273). According to Cheung, the two ideographs represent different kinds of love enacted by Naomi's two aunts: "Obasan's serving hands" in silence and Aunt Emily's "passionate thing" through words (Cheung 165). Naomi's awareness of the loving intentions of both Obasan and Emily enables her to achieve a "transcendent empathy which conflates words and silence, presence and absence, and testifies to the presence of an absent mother's nurturing love—yasashi kokoro" (McFarlane 405).

This "transcendent empathy" is symbolically turned into a being at the end of the novel. Symbolically taking Aunt Emily's coat with her, Naomi returns to the coulee, which she and Uncle visit on every anniversary of Nagasaki's bombing. According to Tourino, Naomi's return to the coulee "creates the effects of cyclical return" (Tourino 149). By comparing the similar language of the closing passage of each visit, he claims that the coulee is transformed from "the protective womb of silence and stillness" into a site of second birth where Naomi senses "new possibilities for communication." Since Naomi realizes the truth about her mother's death and the love embedded in Emily's words, she experiences an epiphany during the second visit to the coulee. She says: "Above the trees, the moon is a pure white stone. The reflection is rippling in the river—water and stone dancing. It is a quiet ballet, soundless as breath" (Kogawa 296). Like the harmonious vision Maxine demonstrates in "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," these sentences represent Naomi's awareness of a new language that incorporates silence into speech, stone with water, and that creates a double-vision of Japanese tradition and western culture. By employing this language in the process of cultural revision and self-invention, Naomi brings the stories of her family and the repressed history of Japanese Canadians to light and symbolically experiences the second birth of self.

Conclusion

> If it – learning to live – remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life or in death alone. What happens between two, and between all the 'two's' one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost ['s entretenir de quelque fantome]. So it would be necessary to learn spirits…. (Derrida xviii-xix)

As an enigmatic and liminal figure between the living and the dead, present and past, a ghost acts as a productive means for ethnic writers to cross the figurative boundary between presence and absence, dominant and subordinate, self and other. One way of knowing spirits is to learn their languages, their ways of speaking. By investigating the effects of the ghost's madness and uncanny silence in the three minority texts, I conclude that the literary representation of ghost's otherness functions as narrative strategies for challenging hegemonic discourse and revising the traumatic memories and identities of ethnic minority. In *Beloved*, the ghost's mad and chaotic expression exemplifies the voices of African-American women in a position of resistance to the racist and patriarchal logos. In *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*, the ghost's uncanny silence leads to the evocation of the repressed memories to which the second-generation Asian-American heroines respond by means of creative process of historical recovery and ethnic invention.

In sum, being sometimes invasive and sometimes uncanny, the ghosts ceaselessly confront the living with the denied and silenced past and urge them to listen and reply to their calls. By learning the ghost's languages and communicating with them, the traumatized subjects are not only able to redefine their relationship with the past, but also can develop a new, open-ended and communal language to reconstruct their identities.

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